

2 The Making of the Haitian

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[291] fires in their houses at night to keep out the damp cold that sweeps through the passes. And a man on the trail before dawn may wear a blanket over his head and carry a glowing ember with him for warmth.

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[131] On the south coast there are sometimes hurricanes and tidal waves, and many a small fishing boat and grass-covered house has been washed away in these storms. But the great mountains of the southern range deflect the winds, so that to the north their full fury is never known.

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192 In the great Bay of Gonaïves the fishing boats sail out at night with the friendly winds that carry them to the fishing grounds of the island of La Gonave, and they return to the shore with their catches in the morning, or in the afternoon with the setting sun. The sailing boats from the tiny fishing village called Ville Matelot each day pass the deserted inlet named Isle à Cabrit, where four Indian camps once stood. Today Isle à Cabrit is only a waterless, denuded place, a hunting ground for Carib and Arawak pottery and carved stone images.

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[50] In the frontier lakes of the Cul-de-Sac Plain there are wild ducks and alligators. Here the villagers fish with nets from rafts and dugout canoes. Now and then an iguana is seen, but there is little other game, because the edible wildlife of the country was long ago eaten by hungry people.

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[241] For the things that grow wild the Haitian is grateful—the avocado, the mango, the cashew, and the cotton which once planted produces again and again each year. He is grateful for the coconut palms, the calabash tree, the gourd vines, and the medicinal herbs that grow on every side. But the gifts of nature are not prolific. Most of the great stands of timber—
[131] lignum vitae, mahogany, dyewood and pine—have been cut away. Once
[154] fertile garden spots have dried up, and the soil that produces the yams, the pumpkins, the kassir, and the rice is tired.

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164 But the Haitian himself is not tired. He has suffered from malaria, yaws, and chronic hunger; yet out of the great old mountains of Haiti he has fashioned a way of life and a nation.

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181 The Haitian of today was created out of the fabric of three continents—Africa, America, and Europe. He was shaped out of the plains and hills of Nigeria, Dahomey, and the Congo; the summers and winters of Europe; and the mountains and mountain mists of Haiti itself. He is the synthesis of the folk beliefs of the French and Spanish peasants, the Yoruba and the Arawa of West Africa, and perhaps of the Carib Indians with whom he had close contact during his first days in the New World. He has brought into affinity the religious practices of Africa and the beliefs of the Church of Rome. He is outwardly simple and poor, but inwardly he is a complicated and rich man. He is rich in music, in the capacity for spiritual expression, in tradition, in folklore, and in memories. He has been able

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9. Land and Work

311 There is a common Haitian saying which goes: "Pitit mangé, travaille
 161 youn pile" (A little food, but tremendous work). This is the way the
 461 Haitian peasant sees it. There is endless labor in the fields or in the
 perpetually eroding mountain gardens, on landholdings that are too
 small to give any promise of a better life. The rains that give life to
 the crops take away, year by year, the nourishment of the soil. Where
 forests or lush groves once grew on the hillsides, there are now deep,
 dry gullies. Where coffee plants, cotton, and yams once grew abundantly,
 there are now fields of stones. This is the heritage of the peasant farmer
 of today. Small holdings on the hillsides and in the valleys have become
 smaller through the years as the population has swelled and the land
 been subdivided. Three and a half million people must take their sus-
 tentance from that land. More than three hundred persons must share
 each square mile of soil. But most of Haiti is mountainous and formi-
 dable to agriculture. Two-thirds of the land area is untillable by modern
 standards. There is less than one acre of useful land per person. The
 best of the land in the alluvial valleys is held by large corporations
 producing sugar and sisal. Flat, arid stretches elsewhere are semi-
 desert.

241 In the small gardens the peasants grow maize, *si mis* (millet), coffee,
 433 bananas and plantains, cotton, beans of various kinds, yams, pumpkins,
 sweet potatoes, and manioc. In the delta areas they grow rice, and along
 226 the long coastline thousands of fishermen sail out in crude but sturdy
 boats to bring back fish from the sea. Citrus trees, mango trees, and
 avocado trees grow wild; but they are fewer than in the old days. The
 Haitian works the soil and manages to subsist, but nature and history have
 not been kind to him.

181 Even less kind have been some of the chroniclers of the past, who have
 461 sought to disparage the Haitian as a lazy and careless creature who would

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rhythmically, to the accompaniment of drums, *catus*, or horns, while a singing leader composes topical songs in which the laborers join.

The tools which a rural Haitian chooses, and the way he uses them, often are in a West African tradition. He performs a multitude of tasks with his machete, or bush knife: weeding a garden, peeling an orange, cutting down a tree, making a drum or mortar, opening a coconut. It is an all-purpose tool, as it is in Africa. Until a few years ago it was supplemented by the extra-long, heavier, "double machete." The axe and the chisel are known and used too, but the machete is supreme.

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[412] The hoe is the tool for tilling the soil, even in the flat country, and even though the Haitian has horses and cattle which could pull a plow.

Horses are for riding and not for pulling. In carrying loads, the Haitian peasant still prefers the head to the shoulders. If he has a donkey, the donkey will carry for him. An old Haitian proverb goes: "Meçi Bondieu pou' bourrique là, si nous pas gainyain bourrique là faut Haitien po'té tout bagaille" (Thank God for the donkey, if we didn't have the donkey the Haitian would have to carry everything). Generally speaking, the

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493 rough and rocky terrain of Haiti and inadequate secondary roads have done nothing to encourage the use of carts or wagons.

Corn is stored in the trees, as in West Africa, or in granaries built upon stilts, also as in West Africa. The Haitian makes his fire in the African fashion, with several long sticks or poles meeting point-to-point in the heart of the fire. As the ends are consumed, the sticks are pushed toward the center. Grain is pulverized in large wooden mortars, as in West Africa, and winnowed in a woven tray. Fish traps are sometimes woven in the traditional West African manner, and fishermen often set their nets in converging spirals and beat the water with sticks to drive the fish to the center. And on the rivers and lakes are to be seen dugout canoes of a kind familiar on the inland waters of West Africa.

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[334] The folklore of the fields contains many themes known to the West African. One old Haitian farmer, discussing the spiritual relationship of the planter to the earth, declared that a man must be strong and potent when he plants, else the crops will be vitiated and sickly. For this reason, he said, a man must not plant seeds the day after he has had sexual intercourse, because he has been temporarily drained of his life-giving powers.⁹

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538 The tale of the hoe that worked by itself in the fields is also widespread. It enters many animal and Bouki stories, and also is known in a form that is familiar in West Africa. In this story, there was once a man who owned a hoe which worked by itself whenever a magical formula was pronounced. It would stop working whenever the magical
9 [For footnote, see Category 116, p. 352.--Analyst]